

❖ Your PTA and the Interagency Coordinating Board ❖

by Ginny Gong, Director
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Greetings to MCCPTA leadership. I am pleased to have this opportunity to share information on the mission of the Interagency Coordinating Board (ICB) for Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF), established in 1978, and the philosophy behind the guidelines that are in effect for the sharing of space. The concept of sharing space is complex.

The ICB is comprised of 12 members: the County's Chief Administrative Officer, Superintendent of Schools, President of the BOE, Staff Director of the County Council, President of Montgomery College, a Commissioner from Park and Planning, two principal representatives, and four appointed citizen representatives. The Board is charged with making policy decisions related to the community's use of public facilities and CUPF is responsible for implementing the decisions. In addition to providing access to schools, CUPF leases space for use in libraries, regional service centers, closed schools and other government buildings. CUPF operates as an Enterprise Fund and is supported totally by fees from community users. No tax dollars are used to support the community use program.

Centralized Scheduling has been implemented in all elementary, middle, and four pilot high schools (B-CC, Kennedy, Richard Montgomery, Paint Branch). In these schools, all community use activities (including most PTA activities and the schools' own programs that include additional staff costs) are scheduled by CUPF. Much of the impetus for Centralized Scheduling came from the need to coordinate all use in schools after hours and concerns that the rules for using county facilities did not seem to apply equally to everyone. That is a perception that must be corrected because schools are valuable resources paid for by all county residents through their taxes and, therefore, must be accessible to them when not being used by schools for their instructional programs. This is especially important when considering that 75% of county residents do not have children in MCPS yet their tax proceeds provide for building, operating, and maintaining these facilities. The benefits of Centralized Scheduling are obvious in terms of conflict resolution and energy management. We now have a picture of all activities taking place throughout the county and are able to work with schools to limit energy costs to only those areas of the facilities being used by the community.

The general rules for community use have been in place for more than 25 years. What has changed over the years has been aspects of implementation. With the use of technology, efforts to streamline the process have improved accountability as well as addressed safety and security concerns. Guidelines are now being applied universally for all user groups.

PTAs are nonprofit organizations, but perhaps what is not apparent is that more than 97% of our users are nonprofits, less than 3% are commercial groups. As nonprofits, they are all concerned with costs but the ICB is convinced that everyone must contribute to wear and tear. There was an across the board fee increase in 2003 and the structure was revised, with some fees being increased and modified in 2006, and yet excluding Union required increase in staff costs, there has not been a general fee adjustment since 1992. We are routinely being asked to cover the increases in utility costs, supplies, wear and tear, and staff coverage to MCPS. As you can see, keeping facilities affordable and accessible is a challenge.

We understand the closeness of the relationship between a PTA and the school and the feeling of "partnership" this evokes. However, we also have a responsibility to ensure the rights of all county residents to use these facilities, knowing that these same PTA members are often members of other user groups as well.

There are certain PTA activities that are so closely related to the educational function of the K-12 academic program of the school that they are viewed as school functions. These activities are

administratively booked, based on information you provide both to your CUPF Program Specialist and to the school and are held without cost to the PTA, e.g., monthly PTA meetings. Other activities, however, are much more similar to community activities, such as PTA fairs, carnivals, and socials and are expected to contribute to ICB's reimbursements to MCPS for staff coverage, supplies, utility costs, and wear and tear on schools. These activities are scheduled by CUPF.

PTA-sponsored activities are given priority consideration (and the lowest facility rates) and are scheduled in advance of other public or community functions. For example, if the PTA wanted to use multiple rooms in the school for a weekend fee activity, they would be charged only up to a maximum of three units (rooms) exclusive of the gym, plus any clean-up at the Building Worker rate of \$28 per hour and the start-up fee of a flat \$14. Thus, if the PTA were using 10 classrooms and the all-purpose room, they would only be charged for three rooms. If they were using 10 rooms and the gym, they would be charged for the gym rental and 3 rooms. This represents a significant savings over what other groups are charged.

To take full advantage of this benefit, earlier planning is necessary. We understand that PTAs are volunteer organizations and it is sometimes difficult to coordinate complex planning well in advance. However, many of the organizers of other activities that take place in our facilities face similar obstacles. We need to give them as much planning time and notice as possible so that their events can also be successful. This is why we have the "special PTA priority window."

The major window for users to submit their requests is from July 15 - August 1. During that time, about 4,500 indoor use forms (does not include the numerous requests for outdoor use) are submitted to this office for consideration of programs that begin September 1 through March 31. **PTAs have until August 15 to submit their requests.** For the most part, whatever PTAs need PTAs will get if submitted by August 15. The PTA programs are entered into the computer and no users are scheduled in those rooms on those days. Please keep in mind that users are contacting us regularly asking for the status of their permits, but we wait until after the **August 15** deadline before issuing permits to community groups. Plus, outdoor users are cancelled accordingly when PTAs inform us by August 15.

Booking PTA functions in advance allows us to give these other groups an accurate and timely picture of facility availability so that they can begin to develop their programs. Of course, we will still serve PTAs that do not submit within this special window, but we cannot move or cancel other users that followed proper procedures to secure facility space and have already planned for their events. These events also serve county residents and, in fact, many serve Montgomery County children that may attend the school itself or live in the neighborhood.

Because any change in procedure can be confusing, especially for PTAs who may be accustomed to special arrangements in the past, we have tried to be sensitive to these concerns in our phasing in of Centralized Scheduling over the past few years. Community activities were cancelled to accommodate last-minute PTA requests when possible. A transition period was built in to help ease PTA representatives into the routine of submitting requests to CUPF within specific timeframes. We are now 7 years into Centralized Scheduling and are pleased to report that many PTAs have adjusted well to the new system and are submitting timely requests.

We are confident that centralized scheduling will ultimately provide a win-win solution for all parties involved. We hope all PTA representatives will focus on scheduling their events early, eliminating last minute conflicts. An open invitation is extended to all incoming PTA presidents to attend one of our weekly Wednesday morning training sessions held at CUPF offices to better understand the process. Call 240-777-2706 to register.

With better planning on everyone's part, we hope that all users of public facilities will experience success with their worthwhile endeavors to serve county residents. My staff and I are always willing to work with the PTA to discuss ways to improve the process.